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AUTHOR Juul, Kristen D.
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ABSTRACT

The author discusses the need for The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) to expand its concern to international special education. Six goals are listed for CEC's involvement (sample objectives in parentheses): establishment of a worldwide organization dedicated to the education of handicapped children and youth (identifying interested universities, schools, facilities, and individuals); dissemination of information about special education (expanding the international coverage of the Educational Resources Information Center); establishment of an international network of professional development programs (promoting international exchange of teachers and professors); encouragement of international research in special education; and establishment of an agenda for regular world and regional conferences in conjunction with other national and international organizations (expanding the CEC world congress idea). (CL)

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Directions for the Council for Exceptional Children in International Special Education

Kristen D. Juul, Professor

Department of Special Education

Southern Illinois University at Carbondale

Carbondale, Illinois 62901

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Special education and other services for the handicapped have during the past thirty years had a phenomenal development. In many countries this growth has manifested itself in new laws, increased funding, the training of more personnel, the formation of new professions, a greater differentiation of programs, new theories of treatment and education, considerable research on methods and materials, and an avalanche of more or less worthwhile and relevant literature.

The need for communication, information and cooperation across national boundaries has increased correspondingly. Some professions have met this challenge effectively. This is particularly the case with such fields as medicine, psychology, and our sister-discipline rehabilitation. Rehabilitation workers have for years been united in a global network of cooperation and exchange through their international organizations and publications.

Some specific disability areas have established similar cooperative structures. Good examples are the International League of Societies for the Mentally Handicapped and the International Association of Workers for Maladjusted Children.

No such brotherhood across national boundaries exists in special education. There is not a single international organization to be found to which teachers of exceptional children in different parts of the world can belong, and there is no international journal one can turn to for information from other countries. The reasons for this state of affairs can probably be sought in the lack of a clear sense of identity among teachers, their relatively low social status, and a lack of a distinct and circumscribed area of expertise. However, interest in international cooperation is increasing. It can be seen in the rapid growth of the

European Association for Special Education and most spectacularly in the success of the CEC World Congress in Scotland in 1978. On a less conspicuous level, many students seek their education in foreign countries, professors spend their sabbaticals abroad, and study tours are gaining in popularity. International information is also becoming more easily available, and CEC's publication International Perspectives on Future Special Education is truly a milestone.

It is clear that in the development of international special education, CEC must play a pivotal role. With regard to structure, size, resources, initiative, expertise, and experience this organization is in a unique position, both with regard to responsibilities and opportunities.

The first item on the agenda must obviously be the establishment of goals and objectives, procedures, and priorities. Dr. Albert Fink has already invested much effort in formulating major objectives for CEC's involvement in international education.

The following list of goals and objectives will hopefully support and complement his ideas.

Goal 1. Work towards the establishment of a world-wide organization or council of organizations dedicated to the education of handicapped children and youth.

Objective 1. Establish contacts with and get cooperation from relevant and interested organizations in other countries and on other continents.

Much help can probably be secured from the Council of World Organizations Interested in the Handicapped, Rehabilitation International, the World Union of Organizations for the Safeguard of Youth, and the

International Union of Child Welfare which all have a long history of global cooperation.

Objective 2. Identify and draw upon universities, schools, therapeutic facilities, vocational training centers, and individuals with international involvement and interest.

Objective 3. Develop task forces to form objectives and agendas for action.

Goal 2. Promote the dissemination to special educators and other caring professions throughout the world of pertinent information about the education and care of children and youth with special needs.

Objective 1. Expand the international coverage of the ERIC retrieval system. At present only 2% of the references in ERIC are from other countries.

Objective 2. Unite with other national and international organizations such as UNESCO, the Bureau of International Education, Council of Europe, and Rehabilitation International to form a global documentation and information service. The last two agencies already have developed sophisticated multi-language indexing and translation systems.

Objective 3. Create an international journal of special education in cooperation with other national and international associations devoted to the education of the handicapped.

Objective 4. Draw upon American special educators with mastery of other languages to review pertinent new literature in these languages and report on it in the CEC publications.

Objective 5. Expand the National Instructional Materials Information System (NIMIS) to include materials from other nations.

Objective 6. Print an international special education film review catalog similar to the one produced by Rehabilitation International.

Goal 3. Establish a network of programs on an international basis to encourage and facilitate the professional advancement of teachers, professors, and others committed to the education of children and youth with special needs.

Objective 1. Provide opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students to complete some of their studies in other lands.

Objective 2. Promote the international exchange of teachers and professors.

Objective 3. Conduct or support international study tours.

Some excellent programs have been in operation for years. For example, the University of Wisconsin in Madison has routinely had summer study tours to Scandinavia. At the same time, the University has been the host of special educators from all over the world visiting the United States during the summer. New York University sponsors study tours to Denmark and the Soviet Union. It is possible that such enterprises could be greatly expanded.

Objective 4. Produce a document that contains information about institutions interested in international exchange and about agencies and organizations that provide financial support.

Few people know, for instance, that the Rotary Clubs have one year scholarships for teachers in special education who want to do graduate work in other countries. They even give financial support so that the recipients can study the foreign language before starting the formal studies. Another example is the German Academic Exchange which provides financial support to students for short tours as well as for longer post-doctoral studies.

Goal 5. Promote international research in special education.

Objective 1. Form committees of researchers with interest in comparative special education to explore issues for which international research can provide the most reliable answers.

Research in this field is miniscule. One promising development is occurring in Scandinavia where all the Nordic countries have united in a cross-national study in special education. It is carried out under the leadership of Dr. Hans-Jorgen Gjessing at the University of Bergen in Norway and is called the Bergen-Project. Dr. Gjessing and his staff will present the first findings at the conference of the European Association for Special Education in Helsinki this coming August.

Objective 2. Encourage universities and research centers to write research proposals.

Objective 3. Assist researchers in securing funding by locating agencies and foundations that might be interested

in supporting international cooperative and comparative research.

Goal 6. Establish an agenda for regular world and regional conventions and conferences in cooperation with other national and international organizations.

Objective 1. Continue world congresses in the format of the 1978 World Congress in Scotland, but with an expansion to a broader international representation both in the planning and in the participation in the programs.

Objective 2. Develop linkages between CEC and other national and international groups to create a plan for regular regional conferences. Dr. Fink has already submitted a blue-print for such action.

Objective 3. Expand the international character of the annual CEC Convention through the encouragement of more participation from other countries.

It is interesting to observe that the University of Wisconsin advertizes its summer seminars in professional journals in other countries. Why can't CEC do the same?

Another way to attract foreign participants would be to offer a selection of study tours in the United States and Canada in connection with the annual CEC conventions. These tours could vary in length, in geographical areas covered, and in the kinds of places visited. I have personally in mind a 3,000 mile trip starting in Washington, D.C., and covering Philadelphia, New York, Montreal, Toronto, Detroit, Chicago, Nashville, and other places along the way.

These study tours would, of course, also be open to American students and scholars.

The changing economic situations in the world in recent years has made such tours much more feasible for educators in other lands. Some governments also have special scholarships for such educational travels.

Objective 4. Explore the possibilities of opening the CEC to a broader international membership.

At the Congress in Scotland, representatives from third world countries were actually pleading for a chance to be members, so they would be in contact with developments in the United States. They also had no similar organizations in their own countries to which they belong.

It is apparently difficult even to secure a subscription to the CEC journals if one is of a foreign nationality. This difficulty certainly should have a solution.

There are some additional issues that need to be considered. One has to do with the definition of special education. In Europe, for example, special education is generally defined broadly and reaches into and overlaps with allied fields, such as psychology, psychiatry, rehabilitation, physical therapy social services, housing, and recreation. The British 1978 Warnock Report, published by the Parliament, regarding the special educational needs of handicapped children and youth, has the following statement: "Our concept of special education extends beyond the idea of education provided in special schools, special classes or units for children with particular types of disability, and embraces the notion of any form of additional help, wherever it is provided, from birth to maturity to overcome educational difficulty."

Much of current practice in the United States today tends to view special education in terms that are too narrow. We need to widen our horizons and work more closely with allied professions. Psychology, psychiatry, physical education, recreation, dance, theater, and the formative acts have much to contribute.

As an example, several years ago a study was done here at the Philadelphia Child Guidance Clinic. A comparison was made of the relative effectiveness of three types of intervention in improving the academic performance of under-achieving children from a low socio-economic area. One group received direct group training in learning skills, a second had group counseling, and a third had art activities provided by the graduates of an art college. The last group made the most progress. The two people conducting the research were Dr. Barcai, head of child psychiatry at the Hadassah University Hospital, and Dr. Dreman, a psychologist in Jerusalem, Israel. The study was reported in Acta Paedopsychiatrica, or the International Journal of Child Psychiatry. The only reason I came across the article was the fact that we have a medical school at our university.

The visions we have about future CEC action can only be approached through deliberate and careful planning.

There needs to be a listing of priorities of goals and objective. Preference should be given to activities where:

1. There is already a history of positive experience. The success of the 1978 World Congress should place a second congress on the top of the priority list.
2. There is a pool of experienced special educators willing to participate and contribute. Thus a number of CEC members have for years

conducted international study tours and could help give direction in this field.

3. There is strong membership interest both within CEC and in the world professional community.
4. The activity is financially feasible.

Thought should also be given to the establishment within CEC of an office of International Special Education under the leadership of an assistant executive director.

Finally, one should begin to discuss seriously the possibility of forming a Division of International Special Education. This issue has been raised in the past, and it is now time to consider it again. A first step might be to canvass the CEC membership to see how strong the interest is.

These are my thoughts about future directions for CEC in international special education.